

Rules of the Game

Actions (Part Four)

By Skip Williams



This week, we'll finish our look at actions by examining full-round actions and various special actions.

Full-Round Actions

As noted in Part One, a full-round action uses up all your time in a round. You can't combine a full-round action with a standard or a move action, though if your full-round action does not involve moving any distance, you can take a 5-foot step.

Remember that you complete a full-round action during your turn. You do not have to wait until the next round to complete the action (unless you use two standard actions to start the action during one turn and finish it the next; see Part Three).

Full Attack: This works just like the attack standard action except that you can make any extra attacks you have available because of your base attack bonus or equipment. You do not need to specify the targets of your attacks ahead of time. You can see how the earlier attacks turn out before assigning the later ones.

You decide between the full attack and attack actions after you make your first attack. If you decide to use a move action after attacking, then your first attack is considered the attack standard action. Even if you choose the full attack action, you can take a 5-foot step before, after, or during the action. You can interrupt your attacks with a 5-foot step to bring new opponents within reach.

Cast a Spell: Spells with 1 round casting times break the rule about completing full-round actions during your turn. You use a full-round action to cast the spell, but the spell comes into effect just before the beginning of your turn in the round after you began casting the spell.

When a spell takes longer than 1 round to cast, you use a full-round action each turn for the entire casting time, and the spell takes effect just before your turn the round after you finish. For example, a spell with a 1-minute casting time comes into effect just before your turn 1 minute later. Your full-round actions must be consecutive and uninterrupted, or the spell automatically fails. You can, however, take a 5-foot step each round you spend casting.

When you begin a spell that takes 1 round or longer to cast, you must continue the invocations, gestures, and concentration from one round to just before your turn in the next round (at least). If you lose concentration after starting the spell and before it is complete, you lose the spell. Any material or XP components the spell requires are used up when you begin the spell.

You provoke attacks of opportunity only when you begin casting a spell, even though you might continue casting for at least 1 full round. While casting a spell, you don't threaten any squares around you.

Spontaneous spellcasters, such as sorcerers and bards, must use at least a full-round action to cast spells modified with metamagic feats. If such a spell has a casting time of less than 1 round, the character uses one full-round action to cast the spell, and the spell takes effect on the character's turn (see page 88 in the *Player's Handbook*). If the spell has a casting time of 1 round or longer, the spellcaster must use an extra full-round action to complete the spell.

Use Special Ability: As noted in Part Three, using a special ability is usually a standard action, but some may be full-round actions, as defined in the ability description.

From PH pg 188: "Spontaneous Casting and Metamagic Feats: A cleric spontaneously casting a cure or inflict spell can cast a metamagic version of it instead. For instance, an 11th-level cleric can swap out a prepared 6th-level spell to cast an empowered cure critical wounds spell. Extra time is also required in this case. Casting a 1-action metamagic spell spontaneously is a full-round action, and a spell with a longer casting time takes an extra full-round action to cast."

Withdraw: When you withdraw, you can move up to double your speed. The space you start out in is not considered threatened by any opponent you can see, and therefore visible enemies do not get attacks of opportunity against you when you move from that space. (Enemies you cannot see still get attacks of opportunity against you, and you can't withdraw from combat if you're blinded.)

The withdraw action doesn't exempt you from attacks of opportunity when you leave spaces other than the first one you exit during the withdraw action. Because you move when you withdraw, you cannot take a 5-foot step during the same turn.

If you're limited to a standard action during your turn, you can withdraw as a standard action.

Run: When you run, you can move up to four times your speed in a straight line (or three times your speed if you're in heavy armor). You lose any Dexterity bonus to AC unless you have the Run feat. You can run for only a limited time; see page 144 in the *Player's Handbook*. You can't run if the terrain slows your movement or if you can't see where you're going.

Move 5 Feet Through Difficult Terrain: In some situations, your movement may be so hampered that you don't have sufficient speed even to move 5 feet (a single square). In such a case, you may spend a full-round action to move 5 feet (1 square) in any direction, even diagonally. Even though this looks like a 5-foot step, it's not (you can't take a 5-foot step if your movement is hampered), and thus it provokes attacks of opportunity normally.

Special Actions

Most special actions are standard actions or nonactions.

Aid Another: As a standard action, you can help a friend attack or defend by distracting or interfering with an opponent. The opponent must be within melee reach. You make an attack roll against Armor Class 10. If you succeed, your friend gains either a +2 bonus on his next melee attack roll against that opponent or a +2 bonus to Armor Class against that opponent's next melee attack (your choice), as long as that attack comes before the beginning of your next turn. Multiple characters can aid the same friend, and the bonuses stack.

You also can use this action to assist with a skill check, as noted on page 154 of the *Player's Handbook*.

Bull Rush: You perform a bull rush as a standard action (the attack action) or as part of a charge. You must

move into your foe's space to initiate a bull rush. If you're charging, moving into the foe's space is part of your charge movement (this is an exception to the general rule against charging through occupied spaces). If you're bull rushing with the attack action, you must move into the foe's space using a move action or a 5-foot step. See page 154 of the *Player's Handbook* for more information on bull rushing.

Charge: The charge action lets you move up to twice your speed in a straight line and make a single melee attack. If you're limited to standard actions during your turn, you can charge as a standard action, moving up to your speed. Because you move when you charge, you cannot take a 5-foot step during the same turn. See page 154 of the *Player's Handbook* for more information on charging.

From PH pg 154: "Aid Another: In melee combat, you can help a friend attack or defend by distracting or interfering with an opponent. If you're in position to make a melee attack on an opponent that is engaging a friend in melee combat, you can attempt to aid your friend as a standard action. You make an attack roll against AC 10. If you succeed, your friend gains either a +2 bonus on his next attack roll against that opponent or a +2 bonus to AC against that opponent's next attack (your choice), as long as that attack comes before the beginning of your next turn. Multiple characters can aid the same friend, and similar bonuses stack."

Disarm: You can attempt to disarm someone as a melee attack. You usually use the attack or full attack action for a disarm, but you also can disarm as an attack of opportunity.

You can knock something out of a creature's hands with the disarm action, or you can use a free hand to snatch away something. In the latter case, you wind up with the target item in your hand if the disarm succeeds. See page 155 of the *Player's Handbook* for more information on disarming.

Feint: Feinting is a standard action you use in melee combat. It does not provoke attacks of opportunity.

The rules don't say so, but you may want to assume that your foe does not notice a successful feint attempt. If a player character is subjected to feint attempt, the DM should make the required opposed check (see page 155 in the *Player's Handbook*) secretly. To take advantage of a successful feint, you must make a melee attack against your foe on or before your next turn. If you cannot make the attack in time, the feint is wasted.

The Improved Feint feat allows you to feint as a move action.

Grapple: You grapple using the attack or full-attack action. Grappling requires several steps; see Page 155 in the *Player's Handbook* and [Rules of the Game: All About Grappling](#).

Initially in a grapple, you grab your foe as an attack action; all the opposed grapple checks you make after that to resolve the grapple attempt are nonactions for you and for your opponent. Because you grapple as a melee attack, you can initiate a grapple as an attack of opportunity.

If you begin your turn with a foe in your grasp (or vice versa), your initial grapple check to affect your foe (or escape) is an attack action and the check your foe makes to resist you is a nonaction.

Overrun: You attempt an overrun as a standard action that you take concurrently with a move action. This means that you can move up to your speed when overrunning. (As noted in the errata for the *Player's Handbook*, you cannot overrun as part of a charge.) See page 157 in the *Player's Handbook* for more information on overruns.

Sunder: You can attempt to sunder an object as a melee attack. You usually use the attack or full attack action for a sunder, but you also can sunder as an attack of opportunity.

Throw Splash Weapon: You throw a splash weapon as a ranged attack. It takes a move action to draw a splash weapon (though if it is stored in easy reach, you can draw it as a nonaction as part of a move or as a free action with the Quick Draw feat). You use the attack or full attack action to throw a splash weapon. If your splash weapon requires any special preparations, such as lighting a wick, you need a full-round action to prepare the weapon. The splash weapon descriptions in Chapter 7 of the *Player's Handbook* (acid, alchemist's fire, and holy water) make no mention of preparation and I recommend that DMs simply allow characters to draw and throw these weapons. Save the prepare splash weapon action for improvised splash weapons such as flasks of lamp oil.

Trip: You can attempt to trip someone as a melee attack. You usually use the attack or full attack action for a trip, but you also can trip as an attack of opportunity.

Tripping usually is an unarmed attack, but you can use some weapons to make trip attacks as well. Refer to the weapon's description to determine if it's useful for tripping.

Turn or Rebuke Undead: You turn or rebuke as a standard action that doesn't provoke an attack of opportunity, which is the norm for a supernatural ability. The rules don't say so, but it may help to treat a turn or rebuke as a supernatural effect that fills a burst (60 feet in the case of a cleric or paladin, though be aware that it has a maximum number of targets it can affect, and the effect cannot exceed a designated HD cap). See page 159 in the *Player's Handbook* for details on turning and rebuking.

Two-Weapon Fighting: As noted in Part Three, you must use the full attack action to attack with multiple weapons.

Ready: You can use a standard action to prepare another action later in the round. Readying does not provoke an attack of opportunity.

You can ready a standard action, a move action, or a free action; regardless of the readied action, it always costs you a standard action to ready it. When you ready, you must specify the action you will take and the conditions under which you will take it. It pays to be as general as possible when specifying conditions. For example, it's far better to prepare to shoot the first creature that comes around a corner than the first orc that comes around the corner (unless you really are interested in shooting only orcs, or if you're concerned that an ally may come around the corner). When in doubt, ask your DM how specific you must be.

If you do not take your readied action by the time your next turn comes, your opportunity to act is lost, but you can ready your action (or another action) again. When you take a readied action, your initiative number changes, as noted on page 160 of the *Player's Handbook*. When you take your readied

From PH pg 160: "Initiative Consequences of Readying: Your initiative result becomes the count on which you took the readied action. If you come to your next action and have not yet performed your readied action, you don't get to take the readied action (though you can ready the same action again). If you take your readied action in the next round, before your regular turn comes up, your initiative count rises to that new point in the order of battle, and you do not get your regular action that round."

From PH pg 160: "Distracting Spellcasters: You can ready an attack against a spellcaster with the trigger "if she starts casting a spell." If you damage the spellcaster, she may lose the spell she was trying to cast (as determined by her Concentration check result). Readying a Weapon against a Charge: You can ready certain piercing weapons, setting them to receive charges (see Table 7-5: Weapons, page 116). A readied weapon of this type deals double damage if you score a hit with it against a charging character."

action, you usually resolve your action before resolving whatever triggered the readied action. For example, if you readied to shoot a creature coming around a corner, you take the shot before your foe completes his movement. You can use a readied action to disrupt an enemy's spell or deal extra damage to a charging enemy, as noted in the *Player's Handbook*.

Delay: Delay is a nonaction you use to put off your turn until a point in the initiative order that's more favorable to you. You act normally (that is you can choose from the menu of actions noted in Part One) when you finally decide to act. When you finally take your delayed action, your initiative number changes, as noted on page 160 of the *Player's Handbook*. If you delay until another creature's turn, you can choose to act either before or after that creature acts, but if you choose to act before the creature, you must do so before you know what that creature will do.

Readying vs. Delaying: Readying gives you fewer options than delaying, but readying also allows you to interrupt a foe's action, as noted above.

From PH pg 160: "Initiative Consequences of Delaying: Your initiative result becomes the count on which you took the delayed action. If you come to your next action and have not yet performed an action, you don't get to take a delayed action (though you can delay again). If you take a delayed action in the next round, before your regular turn comes up, your initiative count rises to that new point in the order of battle, and you do not get your regular action that round."

In Conclusion

That wraps up our look at actions. I hope the overview presented here proves helpful when you're pondering your next feat of derring-do.

About the Author

Skip Williams keeps busy with freelance projects for several different game companies and was the Sage of *Dragon Magazine* for many years. Skip is a co-designer of the **D&D** 3rd Edition game and the chief architect of the *Monster Manual*. When not devising swift and cruel deaths for player characters, Skip putters in his kitchen or garden (rabbits and deer are not Skip's friends) or works on repairing and improving the century-old farmhouse that he shares with his wife, Penny, and a growing menagerie of pets.

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